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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sub-Commission on Prevention of
Discrimination and Protection
of Minorities
Fiftieth session
Item 2 of the provisional agenda

QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS, INCLUDING POLICIES OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND SEGREGATION AND OF APARTHEID, IN ALL COUNTRIES, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES: REPORT OF THE SUB-COMMISSION UNDER COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS RESOLUTION 8 (XXIII)

Written statement submitted by Caucasians United for Reparations and Emancipation/All for Reparations and Emancipation, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[25 June 1998]

The African-American prayer for a forum

1. Making reference to Sub-Commission resolution 1997/5 on racism and racial discrimination, CURE would like to thank the Sub-Commission for its timely recognition of the fact that the 400-year tragedy of plantation slavery in the Americas continues to be felt, and that African diaspora communities in the Americas continue to suffer from the legacies of the slave trade. This resolution of the Sub-Commission gave encouragement to the so-called African-Americans in the United States of America. As a consequence, our organization was able to introduce a representative of African-Americans, Mr. Silis Muhammad, to the Working Group on Minorities during their recent session in May 1998.

2. Mr. Muhammad delivered a prayer to the Working Group that he had articulated some four years before in a communication under the 1503 procedure on behalf of African-Americans. His prayer was that a forum be established so that the so-called African-Americans' grievances could be expressed, systematically and officially recorded, evaluated and remedied. He asked that this forum be similar to the one established for indigenous peoples in Geneva, but different in that it would be established in the United States of America, the host country of the United Nations and the place in which 42 million descendants of enslaved Africans remain.

3. Recognizing that the Sub-Commission resolution refers to plantation slavery not only in the United States of America, but in the Americas, we ask that the Sub-Commission be conscious of the fact that African-Americans are in a unique position among Africans in the diaspora. African-Americans did not receive the benefits of a partial or full return to self-determination or self-government which began to be enjoyed by Africans throughout the diaspora as a result of the movement towards decolonization in the 1960s. To the contrary, in the 1960s assimilation was further forced upon the African-Americans through a civil rights movement which caused the demise of whatever independent economic and cultural recovery they had been able to achieve during the years of segregation.

4. For those who would argue that the civil rights movement in the United States of America was the will of African-Americans, it should be pointed out that an equally powerful movement towards human rights and self-determination took place at the same time. The late Honourable Elijah Muhammad, although not promoted in the media or sanctioned by the United States Government, was able over 40 years to organize large numbers of African-Americans behind the concept of self-reliance and self-determination. Every effort was made by the United States Government to destroy the independent spirit that was generated by this inspired African-American leader.

5. While speaking to the Working Group on Minorities, Mr. Muhammad pointed out that so-called African-Americans had suffered utter and complete destruction of their culture, language, ethnic identity and religion. For them the United Nations protection offered to minorities is meaningless. Because of the particular cruelty of chattel slavery in the United States, so-called African-Americans were able to retain nothing of their past and of their homelands. Hence the truth arises ... that unlike some of the Africans

in the diaspora, who do retain remnants of their original culture and identity, African-Americans possess no remnants, and therefore must build their future from nothing but their own will to survive slavery. Thus, the vast majority are in the condition of a lost people whose assimilation has been so complete that they cannot identify what they suffer from.

6. A special issue of the American magazine Newsweek reported that slavery and racism were comparable to the "chicken and the egg". They concluded that the most malign legacy of slavery was racism. We agree that racism is a legacy of slavery. But we feel that along with many other legacies, it is but a symptom of the far greater problem. The right to self-determination has always been denied African-Americans throughout their 443-year history in the Americas, including 222 years of being subject to the will of the United States Government. We ask: If African-Americans had ever been allowed, assisted or encouraged in their efforts toward self-determination, would they now be subject to what is perhaps the most virulent racism in the earth?

7. We believe that if the United Nations will establish a forum for African-Americans in the United States, through that act alone African-Americans will begin to fully understand that the nations of the earth wish to help them recapture their rights as human beings. We believe that by doing this, an upcoming race war, or racial violence, may be averted. We join Mr. Muhammad in his prayer for a forum and we encourage the Sub-Commission to act upon his prayer quickly. As a recent hate crime in Texas should demonstrate (the crime wherein a Black man was abducted by three white men and was dragged behind a pick-up truck until his head was torn from his body), the potential for an eruption of racial violence in the United States is greater by the day and by the hour.

8. We have taken notice of resolution 1998/26 of the Commission on Human Rights regarding the upcoming World Conference against Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. We see that the Commission on Human Rights has invited the Sub-Commission to carry out preparatory studies without delay, and to transmit its recommendations to the Commission and to the Preparatory Committee. The Commission also asked for the recommendations of specialized agencies of the United Nations and the full participation of NGOs. We are responding to the call, and are prepared to be involved in the preparatory process for this world conference. As a first step we would suggest that studies be undertaken which would serve to evaluate the damage done to the African-American people.

9. Two areas that our organization has pinpointed as especially in need of study are:

(a) The lingering effects of plantation slavery, terrorism and racial discrimination on the present-day physical and psychological health of African-Americans: we want studies specific to African-Americans and related to chattel slavery. There is a great deal of information available on the subject and some enlightening research has been done, but there exists no comprehensive analysis or conclusion as to damage.

(b) The criminalization of the African-American. There is broad-based agreement in the African-American legal community that the United States legislature and state legislatures have passed racially discriminatory laws which target African-Americans. These laws have resulted in the rapid rise in incarceration rates and rapid growth of a private prison industry. The sad fact is that young Black men are now more valuable to the United States economy in prison than out. In prison many of them are put to work manufacturing products for private corporations. The criminalization of the African-American may soon be recognized as the resurrection of slavery in the United States.

10. We are confident that any studies undertaken by the Sub-Commission or by specialized agencies of the United Nations will serve to verify the need for a forum for African-Americans.

11. We cannot express strongly enough the need for action in response to the prayer of Mr. Silis Muhammad. We also cannot express strongly enough the need for the independence of a United Nations forum and the independence of United Nations-sponsored studies. We pray that the United States Government may not be given the tacit approval of the United Nations to undermine the efforts that Mr. Muhammad is making on behalf of African-Americans.

12. We continue to stress that when evaluating racism in the United States, African-Americans should be studied within their own category. We assert that the racism directed against African-Americans is not comparable with that directed against other people of colour in the United States, or ethnic or religious minorities in the United States. There is a question as to whether or not African-Americans even fit within the category of minority. Therefore, we stress that African-Americans should be viewed separately for the following reasons: (a) because of the evidence that they do not fit the category of minority. (In his closing statements to the Working Group on Minorities, the Chairman, Professor Eide, did offer words to the effect that thought must be directed towards the problem of African-Americans not fitting the category of minority, and the question of where they do fit.); (b) because of the long time period of their oppression, the brutality of their experience, the damages which have been inflicted, and the fact that they have not received any remuneration nor have they been assisted in attaining any degree of repair (their culture, religion, language and land) like other Africans who suffer the legacies of plantation slavery; and (c) because of the well-documented history of United States Government subversive action taken against the grass-roots movements of African-Americans, and manipulation of their collective will through the media.

13. With appreciation for the efforts of the United Nations to see that justice is done in the earth, we again thank the Sub-Commission for the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities for its attention directed towards the legacies of the slave trade.